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ABSTRACT

A study at Purdue University (Indiana) investigated three English-as-a-Second-Language students' understanding of and attitudes toward teachers' written feedback on compositions. All were enrolled in an expository prose class for non-native speakers of English, and all were freshmen of varied ages and backgrounds. Data were gathered in videotaped think-aloud protocols in which the students responded to teacher comments on an essay, interviews concerning preferences for written comments, a student take-home questionnaire on types of written feedback, and a teacher interview. The responses of each student are presented and analyzed separately. It was found that all three students were heavily investing in reading and responding to their teacher's commentary, and all were frustrated with the grammar/vocabulary correction system used by the teacher, because the students forgot what certain correction symbols meant, and wished explicit feedback on grammar. (Contains 26 references, and the system for coding students' verbal behaviors during think-aloud protocols is appended.) (MSE)

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ESL WRITERS' REACTIONS TO TEACHER COMMENTARY: A CASE STUDY

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1. Introduction

The question of what constitutes "good" commentary on second language students' writing has been explored quite extensively from the teacher's perspective (cf. Aly, 1992; Cardelle & Corno, 1981; Chaudron, 1984; Cohen, 1987; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Dessner, 1991; Devenney, 1989; Fathman & Whalley, 1990, Hendrickson, 1976; Kepner, 1991; Lalande, 1982; Lam, 1991; Land & Whitley, 1989; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Semke, 1984; Zamel, 1985). However, relatively little research has considered what students think about our commenting practices or how well they understand them. The research which has addressed these issues consists for the most part of surveys (cf. Enginarlar, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991; and Radecki & Swales, 1988). These surveys have yielded several interesting findings. First, they have indicated that ESL and EFL students want and expect their teachers to correct all of their errors. Additionally, they have suggested that students believe they profit from teacher feedback.

Students' attitudes toward and preferences for teacher commentary are important variables to consider when examining the effectiveness of feedback, especially given the fact that ESL students often come to writing classes with expectations about what types of teacher feedback is appropriate and useful which differ markedly from teachers' and/or native speakers' expectations, as Leki (1991) has pointed out. The surveys which have been conducted have provided useful information about groups of students; however, they are limited in their capacity to report on students' specific reactions in that they are retrospective. This paper attempts to broaden our understanding of ESL students' attitudes, by examining three ESL students' immediate reactions to teacher-written feedback on multiple drafts of a composition. It is an

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exploratory, pilot case study and considers three questions related to students' affective responses; these are presented in (1):

(1) Research Questions:

a. What kinds of teacher-written feedback do students understand and what kinds do they have trouble understanding?

b. What kinds of teacher-written feedback do students like best and least on their drafts?

c. What kinds of teacher-written feedback do students find most and least useful in helping them to revise drafts and write future essays?

2. Method

Context: I conducted the case study at Purdue University with three students from one section of a Spring 1994 English 101I class, an expository prose course designed for non-native speakers of English. I chose to work with students in one class in order to limit the potential differences in teaching approaches and teacher-response styles. The teacher was not informed which students were participating.

The teacher of this section of 101I utilized a three-draft system for compositions wherein students received feedback from a small group of their peers on their first drafts, and comments from the teacher on their second and third drafts. The teacher gave students comments on content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and conventions on the second and final drafts. The paper which the students were working on while they participated in the study was their fourth--a report of an interview they had conducted with an expert in some field.

Participants: My participants were three ESL students who volunteered their time--one female and two males. They represent two cultural backgrounds and three languages: the female, who will be referred to as Michelle, is a native speaker of Chinese and Taiwanese from Taiwan, and the two males, who will be referred to as Sedek and Victor, are native speakers of Malay from Malaysia.

Michelle was an 18-year-old freshman who was majoring in Communication. At the time of the study, she had been in the US for four years. She had received extensive English instruction in the areas of reading and writing at the primary and secondary levels in Taiwan and

in the secondary and college levels in the US. She considered herself an "average" writer in English, claiming that she sometimes writes in English while planning in her native language.

Sedek was a thirty-eight-year-old freshman majoring in Tourism, a subject which he intended to teach when he returned to Malaysia. He had been in the US for approximately eight months at the time of the study. English 101I was his first writing course in the US; however, he had approximately 11 years of English language instruction and English composition instruction at the primary and secondary levels of schooling in Malaysia. He rated himself a "good" writer in English, saying that he plans and writes in English very often. He also noted that he loves to write, and has written three books on computers in Malay.

Victor was a twenty-four-year-old freshman majoring in hotel management who already held a diploma in the subject from a technological institution in Malaysia. In addition to Malay and English, he spoke Mandarin Chinese. At the time of the study, he had been in the US for approximately eight months. English 101I was his first English composition course in the US; however, in Malaysia, he had more than twelve years of instruction in English. He judged himself to be an "average" writer in English.

Data Collection: I used a variety of methods to collect data for this study. The primary data consists of videotapes of the students participating in think-aloud protocols in which they reacted to comments their teacher wrote on their second and final drafts of their interview paper. I collected each of my subjects' second and final drafts (without informing the teacher of who I was working with) and gave the commented-on drafts back to the students for the first time at their think-aloud protocol sessions. Drawing on Hayes & Daikers' (1985) methodology, I instructed the participants to follow the normal procedure they would follow if they were to have received the draft back in class, but to say all of their thoughts about the comments they received on their draft out loud. They were reminded that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers and encouraged to be honest.

After the students read through and thought aloud about their commented-on drafts, I interviewed them concerning their preferences for written comments. Both the think-aloud

protocols and the students' responses to the follow-up interview questions were videotaped. I also gave students a take-home questionnaire which focused on their perceptions of the importance of various types of written feedback, and I interviewed the teacher about the assignment, her views about commenting on students drafts, and her views on teaching writing to ESL students.

Data Analysis: To analyze the data, I first decided to examine the function of the comments provided by the teacher on each draft to get a sense of what types of comments each student received. The coding taxonomy I used to categorize the function of the teacher's comments is based in part on one developed by Ziv (1984). It divides comments into Explicit and Implicit categories and then further divides them by the level of concern they attend to (Macro-level versus Micro-level). Content and organization fall into the Macro-level, and these are then subdivided into categories denoting whether a Macro-level comment suggests addition, deletion, substitution, or evaluation of material. Grammar, vocabulary, and convention use fall into the Micro-level, and these categories are then subdivided into categories which suggest the primary purpose of the Micro-level comment or marking--be it addition, deletion, substitution, or clarification. It should be noted that it was sometimes difficult to decide which category to place a comment in; however, I attempted to be as consistent as possible using the definitions I adopted for Explicit and Implicit comments. These definitions are presented and briefly exemplified in (2) and (3):

(2) Explicit Cues--Comments which provide writers with Explicit directions for revising their paper. These include instances where the teacher changes/substitutes something, adds something, deletes something, or gives direct instructions to the writer in the form of written comments (not in the form of codes, lines, boxes, etc.). For example, a box around the words "views or sees" with the words "pick one" written above it by the teacher in the sentence, "In order for me to find out how an expert views or sees this matter, I carried out an interview," would be considered an Explicit cue on the micro level because it specifies what the writer should do to revise this sentence in their paper--in this case, use one vocabulary item instead of two. Thus, it would be labeled an Explicit vocabulary deletion cue.

(3) Implicit Cues--Comments which provide the writer with some type of information (either a written comment, box, circle, line, underline, etc.) which implies that some type of revision/change should be made, but which does not explicitly indicate in writing what type of revision is needed. For example, a box around the word "prove" in the sentence, "The survey that I carried out several weeks ago prove this," would be considered an Implicit cue on the Micro-level because it suggests to the writer that there is something wrong with the word "prove" in this sentence, but does not tell the writer what type of error it is. In this case, the teacher is drawing attention to the verb so the writer might notice that it does not agree with its subject in number and then add the singular marker, "-s", so that it does. Thus, this comment would be labeled an Implicit grammar cue.

An independent rater also coded the teacher's comments using my coding scheme. We achieved an interrater agreement of 0.90.

To analyze the protocol data, I audio taped the videotapes from each think-aloud protocol session and then transcribed the students' reactions to their teacher's written feedback. I then parsed the transcripts into T-units. Again, to check reliability, I had another person parse the data into T-units using the definition I had adopted. We achieved an interrater agreement of 0.89.

Because what I am interested in is students' affective responses to teacher commentary, I first completed an impressionistic analysis of each student's reactions to each comment they attended to in a draft. This impressionistic analysis of the students' reactions during the think-aloud protocol focused on three aspects: how well participants understood various comments, how well they seemed to like various comments, and to what extent they agreed with various comments. I placed each student response which addressed their understanding, appreciation of, or agreement with a comment on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1-3 (Refer to (4) for the individual scales). Obviously, I could not make use of each scale for each student reaction, as only certain scales were applicable in certain cases.

(4) Rating Scales for the Impressionistic Analysis of Students' Verbal Reactions to their Teacher's Commentary:

(a) Addresses his/her understanding of the teacher's comment :

1	2	3
Does not understand teacher's comment		Understands teacher's comment

(b) Addresses his/her appreciation of the teacher's comment:

1	2	3
Does not like teacher's comment		Likes teacher's comment

(c) Addresses his/her agreement with the suggestion provided by the teacher's comment:

1	2	3
Disagrees with the comment		Agrees with the comment

In addition to impressionistically gauging students' reactions to their instructors' comments, I analyzed what they did when they were reading through their commented-on drafts. I thought that coding the students' verbal behavior while they read through their drafts might reveal some interesting correlations with their affective responses. To complete this functional analysis, I created general labels for the type of verbal behavior the student exhibited while they thought aloud about their teacher's comments on their drafts. My coding scheme stems, in part, from the codes used by Nathan-Dryden (1987), which were adapted from Perl (1978). I have adapted these considerably to suit my purposes. Several readings of the data helped me to generate categories which could adequately describe the students' behaviors during their think-aloud protocols. The coding taxonomy is presented in Appendix A. It includes general categories describing behaviors we might expect a person who is reading written feedback to exhibit--that is, reading comments and text, referring to something that is written on the page, describing comments, explaining something, etc. I applied one code per T-unit, attempting to target the primary function of the students' verbal behavior in each instance. Extra-linguistic responses (laughter, sighs, etc.) were also coded--but were not counted as T-units.

3. Results

I turn now to the results, presenting an overview of the important findings concerning each students' reactions to teacher written feedback.

Victor: My analysis of Victor's verbal behavior during his two think-aloud protocols revealed that he spent the majority of his time Explaining, Reading or Rereading Teacher Comments and Portions of his own text aloud, and Responding to teacher comments (Refer to Table 1 for a breakdown of Victor's reactions). In 36 of the instances where he was Explaining, he was explaining what he meant to say in his paper, and in 18 of these instances, he was explaining why he had included certain information in his text. In addition to explaining, he did a good deal of filling time (with utterances such as "Mmmh," "O.K.," and "Uhh"), and laughing (sort of nervously) in the first protocol. This information is of no interest in itself--in fact, it seems pretty obvious. However, it becomes interesting when we consider what types of comments he spent his time responding to with expressions of his understanding or explanations of his meaning and purpose.

Reaction Function	Second Draft	Final Draft
Reading Comments/Text	35	13
Describing	5	7
Explaining	78	15
Responding	24	4
Filling Time	29	8
Extra-Ling. Response	18	6
Other	24	4

Table 1: Functions of Victor's Verbal Responses during Protocol

In Table 2, we see what types of comments Victor received on his second and final drafts. In both drafts, there were several written comments addressing Macro-level concerns, and a good number of markings which addressed Micro-level concerns.

Comment Function	Second Draft		Final Draft	
	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit
Content	5	8	2	0
Organization	0	0	0	1
Grammar	11	11	2	5
Vocabulary	8	4	0	0
Conventions	0	2	1	0
Evaluate Student	1	0	1	0
total	25	25	6	6

Table 2: Functions of the Teacher's Comments on Victor's Second and Final Drafts

Victor addressed nineteen of the comments/markings during his protocols, coming back to a few of them more than once. He did not exhibit any behavior that suggested that he liked any of the comments; however, he did indicate that he disagreed with two of them. These comments were Implicit cues written in the margin next to paragraphs which described his expert's background; they said, "Is this relevant to why he is an expert?" and "Again, is all this relevant to your topic?," suggesting the deletion of content from his paper. Most of the explaining he did in his second protocol related to these two comments--he spent almost one-third of his protocol time explaining why he included background information on his expert. Victor explained that he did not understand why his teacher asked him whether the background information on his expert was relevant. He said that the assignment required students to explain what made their interviewee an expert. Additionally, he said that his teacher likes to see short stories in students' papers. Part of his explanation is presented in (5):

(5) *Victor*: "Well, you see, uhh, through our classes. . .she like to see some, to uhh, what you call that, umm, umm, a little short story, a short story, what you call that? Mmm, there is a term. It is not metaphor; it is, it's not. I I mean she like to, see more, I mean, uh, short story or whatever, so, didn't I, didn't I just, I think it is nice for me; I mean it is nice, it's what I am thinking, I mean I think it is better for me to write a small short story of . . .the expert's life. So, I I don't think she likes. . .this thing. Maybe I can short this thing?"

He obviously was searching for the word *anecdote* in this passage. I think that this passage illustrates two interesting points. First, unlike what some studies have shown, Victor is very invested in his writing and in reading his teacher's comments. He does not just flip through

the pages and toss the draft aside. Second, it shows that Victor perceives his teacher's advice on writing specific papers as well as her comments on his drafts as general information about her personal preferences--and he is obviously interested in pleasing her.

Victor exhibited more verbal behavior in his protocol relating to his understanding than his agreement. He demonstrated a medium to high level of understanding of a majority of the comments in his drafts. In particular, he had very little trouble understanding Explicit comments on the Macro- or Micro-levels. For example, in (6) we see that he got the teacher's message in her Explicit end comment on the second draft:

(6) *Victor* : [reads teacher's comment aloud]: "'I have to disagree with your peers. Of all your papers, this is the least clear. Did you run out of time? The information is good, and it sounds like the interview went well, but it is not clear what is your idea and what is the expert's.' [explains his understanding of comment]: Oh, O.K. I mean, uhh. . .not clear what is your idea and what is the expert's. Oh, O.K. I don't have any comments; I think maybe she just, she just want to know which, which is, which are my ideas and which are the expert's ideas."

At two points later in his protocol, he affirmed his understanding of this final comment, expressing his agreement with it as well as his plans for revision (refer to (7) and (8)):

(7) *Victor*: "Well, I agree with her. Well I will mention whether which is my idea and which is the expert's idea because I have to be, hmmm hmmm."

(8) *Victor*: "But I have to agree with her, uh. . .in this matter. I agree with her, when she--when she said that, uh, this is not very clear and she didn't know which is mine and which is the expert, and I agree with that, I agree with that. Mm hmm."

Victor also understood Explicit comments on the Micro-level. These consisted of substitutions of vocabulary items, additions of grammatical material, or directions explicitly advising him to delete vocabulary items. What Victor did have trouble understanding were Implicit comments on the Micro-level. He demonstrated a low level of understanding of the marking system his teacher used to indicate grammar and vocabulary problems. The teacher drew boxes around grammatical problems, underlined vocabulary problems with a squiggly line, and circled punctuation and spelling errors--and she explained this system to the students early in

the semester. In reading his teacher's comments on his final draft, he suggested that he did not perceive the distinction between what the lines and the boxes meant. In (9), we see several examples of his confusion about the lines and boxes:

(9) *Victor*: "She made a mark, I mean, a line, some kind of line. O.K. Uhm [he reads aloud the passage in which the teacher has underlined the word "suspicious"]: 'The loss of so many American souls and the miseries brought by both wars somehow created a feeling of anger and suspicious.' Maybe there, there is a more appropriate way <ha ha> I don't know it. So, Mmmm. . . . "A box, what is this for? [he reads aloud the passage in which his teacher has drawn a box around the words "other culture"]: 'According to him, the marriage will provide a broader understanding of other culture' What is this for, by the way ? <ha ha>. . .the boxes, ah, O.K. hmmm. . . .

And then he concluded with:

"Well, actually, she didn't make any. . .comment compared to my second paper where you can see a lot of comments, uh, but not on this paper; just small boxes and lines--mm hmm. . . So, she want to tell me that there is, I mean, there are more appropriate words that can be used in this kind of, I mean, this kind of words, I mean, these words that are used."

It appears, then, that Victor does not have a clear sense of what the Implicit micro level cues mean. This interpretation is supported by what he told me in his interviews. Although he remarked in the first interview that he realized that his teacher had told the class what the lines and boxes meant, and that he would have to refer to his notes, he still did not know what they meant when he read his teacher's comments in the final draft, as we saw in (9). After reading the comments in the final draft, he again said he would look in his notes because he had forgotten what the lines and boxes meant.

Sedek: As Table 3 illustrates, Sedek spent the majority of his protocol time Reading teacher comments and Portions of his own text aloud, Describing teacher comments, Explaining his understanding of those comments, and Responding to teacher comments.

Reaction Function	Second Draft	Final Draft
Reading Comments/Text	26	16
Describing	10	12
Explaining	17	9
Responding	13	4
Goal-Setting	2	1
Other	19	7

Table 3: Functions of Sedek's Verbal Responses during Protocol

In Table 4, we see what types of comments Sedek received on his second and final drafts. In both drafts, the majority of the comments, both Explicit and Implicit, addressed a Macro-level concern--content--while several in the second draft addressed grammar. During his protocols, Sedek addressed seventeen of his teacher's comments.

Comment Function	Second Draft		Final Draft	
	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit
Content	8	8	3	0
Organization	0	0	0	0
Grammar	6	2	1	1
Vocabulary	2	0	0	1
Conventions	1	2	0	0
Evaluate Student	0	0	2	0
total	17	12	6	2

Table 4: Functions of the Teacher's Comments on Sedek's Second and Final Drafts

It was difficult to gauge Sedek's appreciation of the comments. He exhibited a stable, relaxed attitude while he was reading them, although he did indicate that he was happy with his grade on the final draft (he had earned a 91). However, it was not difficult to gauge his understanding. Sedek demonstrated a clear understanding of the Implicit and Explicit cues he received on the Macro-level. For instance, he exhibited an accurate perception of the meaning of an Implicit comment on content which said, "Is this your opinion or hers?" After reading this comment aloud, Sedek responded:

(10) *Sedek*: "O.K., so, she wants this entire paragraph to be specific, to to mention whether his words or my words--hmm--so--yeah, she wants me to be more specific. . . Umm. . . yeah."

He clearly understood the suggestion offered by this comment.

While Sedek had little trouble understanding his teacher's Macro-level comments--much like Victor, he did have trouble understanding her Implicit cues on the Micro-level. What I find interesting in Sedek's case is the mismatch between what he knew and how he responded to comments on his drafts. Unlike Victor, Sedek appeared to be aware of the distinction between the boxes, lines, and circles on his drafts. He explained in an interview that when his teacher underlined something, it probably indicated that a word was wrong, while when she boxed up something, it probably indicated a grammar error. Despite this awareness of her system, he sometimes misinterpreted these markings to be comments on the content of his text. For instance, on the fourth page of his second draft, the teacher had drawn a box around an aphorism he included because it contained a grammar/spelling error (see (11)--the underlined portion indicates the words in his paper which were enclosed in the box).

(11) *Sedek*: "'When a bandwagon role, it is better to be on it than under it.'"

Instead of considering what might be grammatically wrong with this phrase, Sedek assumed that his teacher marked it because it was not relevant. His reaction is presented in (12):

(12) <ha ha> "I don't know why she boxed this one; I think everyone knows this phrase. Probably this, this is not related. I don't know, but this is just an anecdote"

In his post-protocol interview, he confirmed the fact that he took this box to be some type of comment on content, perhaps even an evaluation of it. He said he was surprised the teacher commented on it and explained, "This is like an anecdote, like, and yeah, like I think everyone knows this thing, right?. . . So, what's the, what's the big thing about this one?"

It is not surprising, given his inability to understand some of the Implicit Micro-level cues, that Sedek did not like the method his teacher used to indicate errors in his work. In both interviews, he spoke extensively about this issue, noting that the boxes and lines would not help students to learn, nor would they help him in writing future drafts or papers . He said, "When she boxed this phenomena, I really don't understand. She don't seem to explain what's the mistake here; she just boxed in around them, and there's another one right here, so as a student

you don't know what went wrong, what's wrong with that thing, right? So, I think the way she did this one is, personally, I feel that this thing is not not too good. You won't help anyone by doing this." He later explained that he believed comments should be written in words so that students could better understand them.

Michelle: Finally, we turn to Michelle. Tables 5 and 6 present the data for her reactions to teacher commentary and the functions of the comments she received, respectively. Michelle's protocol was markedly different from those of Victor and Sedek--and this difference is reflected in the types of behaviors she exhibited while she read through her teacher's comments on her second and final drafts. As you can see in Table 5, Michelle did a great deal of Responding, Reading Comments and Portions of her Text aloud, as well as Explaining and Goal-Setting (in the second draft). In addition, she did quite a bit of yelling--which is reflected in the Extra-linguistic response category.

Reaction Function	Second Draft	Final Draft
Reading Comments/Text	25	11
Describing	6	5
Explaining	11	1
Responding	30	38
Goal Setting	9	0
Assessing	4	5
Extra-Ling. Response	9	5
Other	26	12

Table 5: Functions of Michelle's Verbal Responses during Protocol

Comment Function	Second Draft		Final Draft	
	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit
Content	2	1	0	0
Organization	0	0	0	0
Grammar	2	19	11	5
Vocabulary	0	2	2	0
Conventions	0	14	7	0
Evaluate Student	2	0	2	0
total	6	36	22	5

Table 6: Functions of the Teacher's Comments on Michelle's Second and Final Drafts

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The large majority of the comments Michelle received, both Explicit and Implicit, focused on Micro-level concerns--grammar, vocabulary, and convention use. During her protocols, she addressed eighteen of her teacher's comments. My impressionistic analysis of Michelle's affective responses did not yield much information about how well she understood various comments. In many instances, she would just read aloud passages and/or words which were boxed or underlined, and then move to the next comment. One thing which I did note is that she had some difficulty with Implicit comments. For instance, she had trouble discerning what was wrong with a number of phrases which were enclosed in boxes. Two examples are presented in (13)--the underlined portions indicate the words that the teacher had drawn boxes around:

(13) *Michelle*: [reads her text aloud]: "'What I got from the interview is that Mr. Chen's family is most likely as all the tradition Chinese family as my family. . .' [responds to comment]: Hmmm. I don't know what's wrong here. . .I don't know what's wrong there. . . [reads another segment from her text aloud]: 'But I don't think it's too early for his children, his children as almost as my age, to dating with someone now.'"

Note that while she does not seem to know what is wrong, she indicated an awareness that the problem is a grammatical one rather than a conceptual one. In fact, in her first interview, Michelle said she liked the method the teacher used to indicate grammar and vocabulary problems. She explained, "I like the way she marked it; I can see very easily what I do wrong there and I can find out what's wrong in there by myself. So I can be more independent sort of." But in her second interview, she said that the types of comments which she thinks will be least helpful to her in the future are the boxes. She said that it would be better if the teacher wrote down what was wrong in the boxes: "I think she should have to write the way, she can write the way she think that will explain to me. . .I have to know she wanted to add some verb in there, adjective in here. Just don't mark that whole box; I don't know what's wrong in it." It appears then, that Michelle has ambivalent feelings concerning the usefulness of the boxes and lines approach.

Michelle also had trouble understanding Macro-level comments which were Implicit. The final comment she received on her second draft was one which implied a negative evaluation of her performance in the course up to that point. It is presented in (14):

(14) *Michelle*: [reads teacher's comment aloud]: "'Michelle, you might want to recap for us what your survey shows. I agree with Lizhen [her peer] that your expert's background is not quite up to the level required by this class. Also, it seems that you only asked him a couple of questions. I am growing increasingly concerned about the amount of effort you seem to put into this class.'"

Michelle explained several times during the think-aloud protocol that she did not understand what this comment meant, and based on her calm demeanor when she read and reread the comment, she genuinely did not seem to.

In addition to responding to comments by expressing a lack of understanding, Michelle also responded by expressing a variety of emotions--something we did not see with Victor or Sedek. This is what I find most interesting in her protocols. Because she responded so emotionally, I was able to better gauge her appreciation of various types of comments.

Michelle did not seem to like nor agree with Implicit and Explicit comments which Evaluated her writing or suggested that she used the wrong vocabulary terms. For example, in (15), we see her response to her teacher's Explicit Questioning of her use of the term 'generation gap' in her paper:

(15) *Michelle*: "It [the teacher's comment] says, 'Are you sure that it's a generation gap and not a language barrier?' Well of course it is! [raised voice]. . .I mean, mmphm. Oh fine. . .I think it is; of course this is! Mmmphmm. Cuz. . . they can make it a gap. Oh god. . . Fine. I will rewrite this one."

She also did not like her teacher's or peer's Explicitly Evaluative comments which suggested that her expert did not meet the level required by the class. Her response to these suggestions is presented in (16):

(16) *Michelle*: "I think my uh, my expert fit in my, uh, in our requirements; he has personal experience, specializing in the field, and practice in the field. I don't need to have five; you only need three. I have three already. And they told me that my. . .expert's not of the level required for our class. . . Ugh. Do I have to do another interview? Ssss. Uhhh. Uhhh.

[loud] My expert is not quite. . not required. Ssss. Fine, I'll do another interview! Uhhh! [louder than last time]."

Another thing to which Michelle responded strongly was her grade on the final draft--she received a 71, which was then lowered to a 66, a "D"--a score which is attributed, in part, to the fact that the teacher said she had turned the paper in late and neglected to turn in her peer work. Her response to the grade is presented in (17):

(17) *Michelle*: "I felt so robbed. . .Yeah, I mean, she say if I can make my my expert a required level she should, I thought she should give me a higher grade. That's very stupid. I don't like English class at all. Very stupid So stupid I have minus five points here. . .It's a D! It's a D! I'm quite mad. She didn't tell me why. I turned this in on time. . .My peer work. . .I give them; I hand in my peer work paper--I really did, I did, I did hand in my peer work paper. She gave minus five points for that. Aiiyahh [loud yell of sorts] mmphmm. I'm angry. I'm mad. I'm sad. I'm stupid. . .My language. . ."

It is apparent that Michelle took the comments on her paper very personally. Although she claimed to disagree with the negatively evaluative comments on her writing, she still seemed to take them to heart--to the extent that she labeled herself "stupid." She explained in her second protocol that she would like more comments on what she has done well in her writing, and that she thought her teacher always focused on what she did wrong. She also mentioned her desire for positive comments in her interview, saying that while negative comments could sometimes help you to determine what was wrong with your paper, "good things [are what] make her happy." After this, she told me she was going to throw her paper away or hide it somewhere.

4. Conclusion

So, what can we make of these three students' responses to their teacher's comments? Well, first, because this study is exploratory and focuses on only three cases, we cannot draw any large generalizations or implications for commenting practices from it. However, we can see two interesting patterns across the three students' reactions. First, unlike what some L1 studies have suggested, these students seem to be quite invested in reading and responding to their teacher's commentary. While their attention to commentary may have been increased due to the

fact that they were reading it in an unnatural setting--in front of me and a camera!--I do not think that this completely misrepresents the way in which these students read through a commented-on draft. In fact, this interpretation of the students' behavior is supported by their revisions in their second drafts. Each student attended to the teacher's Macro-level comments with some degree of success. Additionally, two of the students (Victor and Sedek), effectively made use of the Implicit markings they received on grammar, vocabulary, and convention-use, despite their frustration with and misunderstandings of these comments. Their final drafts did not exhibit any of the same grammar or vocabulary problems as their second drafts.

This brings me to the second commonality we can see in these students' responses to teacher-feedback. All three participants had some initial difficulty with the Implicit marking system the teacher used to indicate grammar/vocabulary problems. Although they were able, to varying degrees, to make use of these markings to revise, they exhibited quite a bit of frustration with the system, claimed to forget what the different symbols meant, and said that they did not like the method because they wanted to know exactly what was wrong in their papers. This desire for more explicit feedback on grammar corroborates the findings of Leki (1991) and Radecki & Swales (1988) in their surveys on student feedback preferences.

This preliminary study has helped me to refine my research methods for further investigation. In this study, I considered only students of Asian backgrounds, thus, the similarities in their responses may derive from the similarities in their cultural and/or educational backgrounds. In the future, I would like to work with students of various backgrounds and examine their responses to teacher commentary on the various drafts of the essays they write over the course of an entire semester, focusing more specifically on the information I receive from interviews, since it was in the interviews that I got the most detailed and honest responses concerning students' attitudes toward and understanding of comments. I also plan to interview the teacher about the specific comments she/he makes on student drafts, to determine how well his or her intended meaning in comments matches with students' understandings of them. I think that in order to make informed decisions about how to comment on students' writing, it is

important for us, as writing teachers, to understand and take into consideration, not only the research which has evaluated different ways to comment, but also the desires and expectations of our students.

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Appendix A: Coding Categories for Students' Verbal Behaviors during Think-aloud Protocols:

A. Reading
1. Reads a teacher's or peer's comment aloud (RCA)
2. Reads a teacher's or peer's comment silently (RCS)
3. Reads a portion of his/her text aloud (RTA)
4. Reads a portion of his/her text silently (RTS)
5. Re-reads a teacher's or peer's comment aloud (RrCA)
6. Re-reads a portion of his/her text aloud (RrTA)

B. Referring--Refers to something on the page (teacher's/peer's comment or portion of own text) (Rf)

C. Describing
1. Describes a comment he/she has received (DC)
2. Describes an activity he/she does/did in the process of writing (a) paper(s) (DW)

D. Explaining
1. Explains what he/she has done or plans to do in protocol (E)
1. Explains what he/she means in a portion of text (EM)
2. Explains why he/she did/did not include particular content (EC)
3. Explains what he/she understands a teacher's comment to mean (EU)
4. Explains what he/she thinks the teacher wants/likes in (a) composition(s) (ET)
5. Explains writing assignment (requirements, etc.) (EA)

E. Responding
1. Answers a question asked by the teacher (in a comment) (AQ)
2. Expresses understanding through specific explanation, O.K. or Mm hmm (U),
or expresses lack of understanding (DU)
3. Expresses agreement (AGR) or disagreement (DIS) with a comment
4. Expresses an emotion or desire [in words] (EE)
5. Talks about grade(s) he/she has received (G)

F. Searching--Searches for words to express what he/she wants to say (SW)

G. Goal-Setting--Explains a revision he/she plans to make in the future (RP)

H. Questioning
1. Asks a question of the researcher or of self (Q)
2. Questions why a comment has been included in his/her draft (QW)

I. Assessing
1. Expresses a judgment about his/her writing (AW)
2. Expresses a judgment about his/her self, intelligence, etc. (AS)
3. Expresses a judgment about a teacher comment (ATC)
4. Expresses a judgment about the teacher (AT)
5. Expresses a judgment about the course or assignment (AC)

J. Muttering--Mutters to self quietly--inaudible (M)

K. Time-filling--Fills silent time between comments with Um or Uhh, Mmm, or Mm hmm (when not used as expression of understanding), O.K., I mean, Yeah, or So. . . (T)

L. Extra-linguistic Response--Remains silent for a period (S); Laughs (L); Clears throat (C), Yells/Shouts/Screams (Y), Sighs (Ss)

M. Researcher Intervention--Researcher intervenes in protocol to remind student to think aloud or to explain directions briefly (RI)